

An Invitation to Desertion

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Backwoods is an invitation to those who can hear it, those who already know that something is deeply false and diseased about our way of life and who are looking for fellowship in truly confronting our crisis. This crisis is not one of surface issues, something that can be remedied with either well-intentioned social reform or rational tinkering with economic organization — it instead lies at the very core of our way of life: our values, our relations, and our ways of seeing the world. We are living through a great derangement, the ecocidal and immiserating culture of Leviathan, in which the majority are possessed by a slavish and consumerist ethic, a profound alienation from the non-human world, and a deep confusion built on cultural lies.

This piece is an introduction to the theory motivating *Backwoods*. As theory is *thea*, “a view,” and *horan* “to see” (Online Etymology Dictionary), we are talking here of a *whole way of seeing*, an understanding of the world and how to act meaningfully within it. It is presented as an antidote to the reigning ideology of neoliberal republicanism, aiming to delve into the roots of our crisis so as to understand how to live as much as possible outside it and against it. Our ethos will be explicated further in this piece and developed continually throughout this journal, but, briefly, it is the following:

- I. We indict the Civilization of Leviathan as a truly insane way of life predicated on the creation of States to enforce the enslavement of the many so that the parasitic few may acquire absurd wealth and influence. Such social relations are poisonous to all involved, being based on venality and coercion, ridiculous commodity fetishism, and the death of real human community through domination and atomization.
- II. We denounce the world-eating mode of subsistence known as agriculture, with its effacement of ecosystems and their replacement with human domesticates, as a fundamental human error, one generative of mass extinction, soil exhaustion, war, and overpopulation.
- III. We refuse the techno-industrial logic that treats the beautiful tapestry of the living world as just so much grist for the mill, as an unliving “resource” to be “developed” — that is, to be endlessly plundered and paved, extirpated of life, and replaced by parking lots, factory farms, waste dumps, extraction sites, and our apartment complexes and offices that fittingly resemble battery cages.
- IV. We reject the meaninglessness of modernity that has produced perhaps the most humiliated, dislocated, deskilled, distracted, lonely, unhealthy, and unloved people that have ever lived.
- V. We champion anarchy: the freedom that comes from conscious self-ownership and voluntary relations of mutuality with our human and nonhuman kin in small, autarkic, face-to-face communities based in a regenerative relationship with the land.
- VI. We call for the application of knowledge gained from both traditional wisdom and modern ecology to the pursuit of modes of subsistence that are harmonious with the world that sustains us: foraging, hunting, fishing, and forest gardening.
- VII. We espouse a Neo-Luddism that consists of eschewing toxic and stupefying technologies, learning well-rounded skill sets for furnishing a living, and exploring and reviving traditional knowledge, skills, and forms of healing.

VIII. We embrace the vivacity of deeply ecologically harmonious ways of life and the sense of place, presence, and fulfillment that comes from nourishing and being nourished by an enveloping, living world full of consciousness and agency.

To begin communicating our philosophy to those who can hear it, this invitation to the desertion of Leviathan's entrails will consist of: 1. a brief examination of our crisis, which occurs at the levels of human social relations, broader ecological relations, and within the mind of the individual; 2. a frank recognition of the fact that the political realities of modern nation-states mean they can only perpetuate the crisis, not rectify it; 3. a short analysis of the alternative political ideologies of the Left and the Right, revealing that they, too, are incapable of addressing the heart of the issues afflicting us; 4. a look at anarchism, the most radical political tendency, and how even most of its forms fall short of our goals; 5. an introduction to the theory of anti-civilization anarchy on which *Backwoods* is based; 6. and, finally, a first glimpse of the implications for praxis of our perspective: desertion, autarky, and reinhabitation.

The Crisis of Modern Civilization

The vast majority of human beings living on Earth today have extremely little control over their lives and shared world. The ways in which we eat, gain shelter, and make a living are largely decided for us, overdetermined by existing social norms that we can influence only minutely, allowing us only a little room to maneuver in decisions about how we want to live and what values we want to pursue. Most of us eat food from grocery stores or restaurants, grown in distant places we will never see under unknown and uncontrollable conditions. We rent or take out a mortgage to find a home we did not build with neighbors we did not choose and must labor immediately and continually to pay for it. After going from place to place to beg for the opportunity to sell our time, touting our value with a piece of paper that summarizes how compliant and productive we are, we are rewarded by surrendering what is produced with our labor, how our labor is performed, and what is done with the product afterward.

The cycle of life seems to confront us like a blurred, harried race. From childhood, most of us are indoctrinated in compulsory government- or corporate-run schools where we are taught false or misleading histories, trained to be obedient to closely measured linear time, and inured to peer competition in the performance of duties issued by authority. In adolescence, through schooling, socializing, and propaganda, most of us adopt the religious, secular, and/or political ideologies with which we are bombarded that make our reality seem desirable, appropriate, or at least inevitable. Besides the jockeying for selling one's labor mentioned above, what is called success in adulthood for many is vying to exchange the terror of being alone for the sanctioned isolation of the nuclear family, that reproductive unit that allows the cycle to begin anew. Elderhood completes this humiliation, as one's inability or unwillingness to continue laboring often means increasing social irrelevance and impotence that commonly ends in being tended to like an invalid by hired strangers.

What is commonly called our *freedom* consists of only the most trivial and useless forms of freedom: the freedom to vote for some of one's rulers among predetermined and highly similar political candidates, the freedom to choose among commodities that shriek at us with their labels and advertisements, the freedom to escape presence in one's own life through a vast menagerie of

pornography, television series, films, and — most recently, at the furthest outposts of moronizing innovation — virtual reality and sex robots.

As we modern slaves — for we do, as we shall see, truly deserve that perhaps inflammatory title — struggle to assert some sense of agency in our own lives, the wider world engulfs us as a vast and variegated, almost unfathomable crisis. Our crisis is multifarious, a web of interrelated and mutually reinforcing subcrises — ecological, social, economic, psychic, philosophical — that not only immiserate our lives and poison our bodies, but, at this late stage, now threaten the integrity of the whole biosphere, that complex association of organisms and their habitats that encompasses the Earth and gives to it the richness of life in its beautifully simultaneous unity and diversity.

Our ecological crisis is one of accelerating biocide that nearly defies imagination. Because of our technopathological culture of agriculture, urbanicity, and industrialism, species are going extinct at a rate one thousand times faster than the normal, background rate (De Vos et al.). Forebodingly, only the great mass extinctions in the history of the Earth compare to this rate of death, and the signs of its severity surround us. The soils are becoming lifeless (Moss and Scheer) and washing into the sea (World Economic Forum), when they are not being entombed beneath pavement (Brown). The oceans are becoming acidic (NOAA), devoid of coral (Eyre et al.), and emptied of fish (Tanzer, et al.). The air is becoming increasingly carcinogenic (WHO) and extinguished of insects (Hallmann et al.). The more pessimistic of climatologists are currently suggesting that we may be very near or past the point of setting off positive feedback loops that, once triggered, will unavoidably bring about dramatic temperature rises within the next few decades (Hall), and even the minimal goals of the more optimistic are not being met (Shibli).

As without, so within the human psyche is collapsing as surely as the biosphere by which it is nourished. Depression, “the number one psychological disorder in the western world”, abounds, afflicting more than 17% of Americans. Since the inception of unmitigated consumerism in the mid20th century, there are an estimated ten times as many people suffering from depression, with the incidence more than doubling in the past twenty years (Pietrangelo, Elliott and Tyrrell), leading some psychologists to bluntly acknowledge depression as the quintessential “disease of modernity,” as “humans have dragged a body with a long hominid history into an overfed, malnourished, sedentary, sunlight-deficient, sleep-deprived, competitive, inequitable, and socially-isolating environment with dire consequences.” (Hidaka). Fewer than one in five sufferers even seek help or acknowledge their condition — misery, perhaps, is seen as the norm as we expect less and less from life (Real).

Suicide, depression’s catastrophic end, is the eighth-highest cause of death and also on the rise — among the middle-aged, it rose thirty percent from 1999 to 2010 (Elliott and Tyrrell). Undoubtedly, one of the most appropriate symbols of our time is the presence of nets below bridges and windows that cannot be opened on tall office buildings and hotels: the social planners anticipate the broken, hollowed-out worker or customer who decides one lonely night to finally end their existence, and they deny them even that freedom.

Meanwhile, empathy, that essentially human capacity to feel what others feel, has fallen at an accelerating rate in recent decades, while narcissism, the defensive enclosure of the self by a false persona (Vaknin), has increased during the same period. This psychic bleaching is attributed by researchers to widespread social changes: an increased interest in accruing wealth, decreased frequency of reading, increased social isolation, fewer friendships, and, of course, a greatly increased use of technological gadgets (Konrath et al, Kristol, Zaki).

The Politics of “The End of History”

To those who take our shared crisis seriously, the politics of the *status quo* can offer no true solution. More than that, the very existence of politics, as a specialized activity separated from life, is itself a manifestation of the crisis: it is the willed abdication of the many from responsibility over their own lives and shared world; it is the modern secular theology (Schmitt), in which one begs for deliverance by a vast and invisible being known as the State through the prayer of voting; and it is, of course, the province of one of the parasitic classes we call *politicians*, the professionalized caretakers of the dysfunctional social order.

The dominant ideology of the modern political class flows from celebrated political scientist Francis Fukuyama’s laughably millenarian declaration in 1989 that we had achieved “the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (Fukuyama). Fukuyama’s intellectual descendants, the neoconservatives and neoliberals who now dominate both major political parties of the United States, congratulate themselves on ruling a society whose highest virtue is accruing wealth by plundering the living world and climbing to the top of corporate slave hierarchies in the ritualized, pacified war of all against all that we euphemize as “the free market”. This ideology’s elite are, variously, either so convinced of the greatness of their lifeway or so mendaciously self-serving that they forcibly spread the gospel of “freedom and democracy” to foreign lands through wars for “regime change.”

Even among believers in legitimate political authority – that is, those who believe it is appropriate and desirable to have rulers so long as those rulers are good and just – rampant political corruption is an open secret, a fact recognized by the everyperson in quotidian conversation. The ancient habits of graft, influence peddling, embezzlement, and other forms of corruption are not only alive, but thriving – they are a perpetual, inherent feature of a democratic republic, which merely selects for ambitious, venal demagogues who engage in these practices rather than, as it is often imagined, *preventing* their rise. In our present era, the thinness of political legitimacy has reached the point that politicians routinely make speeches in which they deride the political process itself and openly refer to others as bought-and-paid-for political careerists. In this light, when it is often lamented by political commentators that only about half of the US population eligible to vote chooses to do so, we might instead ask why so many people still believe that we can be saved by *getting the right people into office*.

Indeed, the utter emptiness of the political process is laid bare from a cursory examination of the past few decades of U.S. presidential and congressional elections, during which the two dominant parties have repeatedly traded power, but nothing whatsoever has been done to forestall the implementation of newer forms of naked authoritarianism: murder by drone via presidential edict, aggressive persecution of journalists and whistleblowers, the incarceration without trial and subsequent torture of perceived enemies, the nearly ubiquitous surveillance of the population, the normalization of “free speech zones” outside of which protest is not allowed, and the re-legalization of use of the military to enforce domestic law (Abu El-Haj, Mian, Risen, Sterne, Wolf). In 1918, historian and philosopher Oswald Spengler predicted that sometime around the year 2000, the most powerful Western nation, in an effort to resist its decline and destabilization, would become a new Caesarism – we are watching his prediction manifest itself (Spengler).

The Failure of Alternative Political Ideologies

As the desolation around the human being mirrors the desolation within the individual amidst the rise of this new techno-authoritarianism, the political alternatives to the *status quo* on both the Left and the Right, correspondingly, become increasingly ghoulish. With incredible foresight in the mid-19th century, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche predicted that the nihilism brought on by the long, slow disintegration of Christianity would cause people of the West to willingly flee into the prisons of totalitarian political regimes to embrace a new, secular theology as a salve for their existential malaise — the horrors of Communism and Fascism in the 20th century bore out his prediction profoundly (Nietzsche). Now, however, the politically active of the younger generations, with amnesic zealotry, are intent on repeating these failed experiments in the perfectibility of the human through the authority of the State.

Much of the Left, from more reformist to more revolutionary variants, now embraces what is variously called the ideology of *social justice*, *antioppression practice*, or, usually disparagingly, *identity politics*, in which our crisis is understood primarily in terms of institutionalized oppressor/oppressed dyads: White/Person of Color, Settler/Indigenous, Male/Female, Straight/LGBTQ, Ablebodied/disabled, and so forth. Through this understanding of oppression — a fusion of Maoism and vulgarized postmodernism, often under- or unrecognized as such by its adherents — members of the oppressor half of the dualisms are objectively and perhaps unavoidably dominators: not only their actions but also their ways of thinking are apt to reproduce this oppression, even if the individual in question consciously rejects and resists the system of institutionalized hierarchy as a whole. Conversely, members of the oppressed half of the dualisms are not only perceived as innocent victims but also objectively revolutionary figures well-placed to be the leaders of resistance: their status as the oppressed not only gives them a specialist knowledge of the system as a whole, but also means virtually any action that they take against their oppressors is justified and liberatory.

This dualistic analysis, while certainly getting at something genuine, nonetheless ignores or downplays the fact that the actually-lived experience of hierarchy is contextual and dialectical, not universal and straightforwardly top-down: the parasite is not master of the host, but engaged in a complex and nuanced codependence with it that necessarily includes both some level of submission and accommodation by the host and some level of weakness and incentivization by the parasite.¹

An even worse and more obvious error of social justice ideology is its obfuscation that in our present reality the vast majority of so-called oppressors are themselves dispossessed and enslaved subjects. The European-descended American male, imagined as tremendously “privileged” in this world that is supposedly made for him, is himself likely the descendent of people who were serfs, who were dispossessed of land from which they derived their subsistence, and/or who were enslaved in factories. He himself is born into a world in which everything he needs to survive is owned, psychically and materially barred from him. He is no master, but only a differently privileged slave — and every large slave society has depended for its integrity on such tiers of

¹ For some excellent expositions of this theme, see the famous master-slave dialectic of Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the concluding chapter of Orlando Patterson’s excellent *Slavery and Social Death*, in which he argues the biological concept of the parasite is the most parsimonious way of understanding relationships of domination and exploitation.

privilege that divide the slaves against one another. The adherents of social justice ideology have thus internalized their rulers' gambit by blaming our crisis primarily on their fellow slaves.

The creeping authoritarianism of this ostensibly liberatory political tendency increasingly reveals itself in various ways that, while certainly not universal, are nonetheless common and broadly endorsed or tolerated by the Left: a vulgar understanding of post-structuralism that dismisses any pragmatic use of empirical inquiry as necessarily part and parcel of the oppressive Western apparatus whenever its conclusions contradict Leftist ideology;² a Marcusean willingness to legally or extralegally suppress the speech of individuals or groups denounced as objective oppressors by equating speech with violence and the suppression of such speech as legitimately defensive counter-violence (Marcuse); and frequent calls for the mass dispossession, subordination, and punishment of oppressor groups.³ These authoritarian upwellings are, fittingly, entirely consistent with the history of authoritarian communist regimes.

The past few years have seen a sudden rise in a countercultural Right-wing movement roughly organized around the label Alt-Right, a hodgepodge of White Nationalists or "Identitarians," Neo-Reactionaries, conspiracy theorists, and outright self-identified Neo-Nazis. The Alt-Right ideologues present, and presumably sincerely view, themselves as genuinely countercultural or even revolutionary, as they are resisting the rise of "cultural Marxism,"⁴ the suppression of free speech,⁵ and, most importantly, the death of European culture and "white genocide" via mass immigration to Europe and the United States coupled with the currently low birth rates of European-descended peoples. With often messianic, mythic rhetoric, they imagine their victory as a kind of second European renaissance achieved through the creation of a European homeland, a "white ethno-state," in which there would be a flourishing of artistic culture, science, and moral and spiritual life.

Some of the social critiques of the Alt-Right — their criticism of censorship, of endless U.S. war under the military-industrial complex, and of the death of meaning under consumerism — are wellplaced, though neither complete nor remotely satisfactorily addressed by their proposed solution of racial separatism. There is nothing inherently liberatory about racial nationalism, in spite of its ascendancy in European form in the present politics of the Right and in virtually every nonEuropean form in the politics of the Left, past and present.⁶ Racially homogeneous societies historically have, currently do, and undoubtedly will continue to involve all of the horrors of civ-

² For example, through a watered-down and distorted version of philosopher Michel Foucault's concept of the *épistémè* of any era, which he understood as the usually-unconscious, a priori epistemology of an era — that is, the hidden assumptions within a society's discourses of knowledge that make it possible to make truth claims at all. In social justice ideology, this often boils down to shallowly denying the validity of any truth claim deemed as "oppressive."

³ Consider, for instance, increasingly bizarre and common cases like the autumn of 2017 Texas State University school newspaper publishing an article entitled '(white) DNA is an abomination,' or the April 13, 2017 Huffington Post publication of an article advocating for the global disenfranchisement of white men (which turned out to be a hoax article that they fell for and published).

⁴ "Cultural Marxism" is a phrase associated with a Right-wing conspiracy theory that there is an organized Marxist effort to bring Communism to the United States not through sudden, violent revolution, but instead through an incremental change in the country's cultural values.

⁵ Many Alt-Right figures have had their speech suppressed in various ways, including de-platforming at speaking events and bans and shadow-bans on social media platforms. To be sure, such suppression is not at all unique to the Alt-Right — similar suppression has fallen on the Far-Left.

⁶ Black Nationalism, Chicano or Latino/Latina Nationalism, Indigenism, and so-called Third World Nationalism have all been embraced in various forms by Leftists, at least since the formation of the New Left in the 1960s.

ilization enumerated thus far, including slavery. Indeed, the sociologist and historian of slavery Orlando Patterson, in his survey of sixty-six slave societies, came to the perhaps surprising conclusion that racial similarity or difference had no effect on either how well-treated slaves were materially or how much contempt their masters had for them (Patterson). Nationalism only obscures this reality by creating a false unity, an imagined automatic solidarity between parasites and hosts — nationalism is the illusory substitute of the real, intimate community of the small, face-to-face band societies in which we evolved.

At times, Alt-Right figures embrace an eccentric form of pessimistic authoritarianism presented as a kind of amoral, brutalist realism, as when Richard Spencer, in the course of the same conversation, observed that States are essentially institutions of organized violence, that all State societies have aristocracies (whether they acknowledge them or not), and that all States severely infringe on the autonomy of the individual — yet at the same time he asserted that States are inevitable and that he wishes to create a new one, even if that necessitates violence (Warski). This pseudo-radical analysis probes fairly deeply into the nature of authority, yet at the last moment pulls back to redeem it as inevitable and desirable.⁷ Indeed, Spencer's vision of establishing a desirable society through an "ethno-state" is either deviously mendacious or hopelessly naïve, as — even if one were, due to an extreme White Nationalism, indifferent to the terror and misery that would undoubtedly be caused by an ethnic cleansing of all or part of the United States — the bureaucratic-police apparatus necessary to achieve it would assuredly develop its own inertia and become an institution of sustained tyranny over its European-American host population. The Alt-Right thus ironically parallels the vulgar communists who imagine, against evidence and intuition, that a *dictatorship of the proletariat*, having seized the State and used its authoritarian powers to secure the transition to communism, would ultimately then allow a *withering away of the State* to create a stateless society. The irony of this parallel dissipates with the clarity that both the political Left and the political Right have, from an anarchist perspective, always had more in common than they have had differences: both have the aim of Statecraft — that is, authority of the few and slavery of the many.

The False Liberations of Minimalist Anarchism

What of anarchism, that most extreme political philosophy of human freedom? Anarchism deserves great credit and consideration for its liberatory recognition that the freedoms of the individual and the freedoms of the community (or positive and negative freedoms) are not always and inherently mutually opposed; they can, in certain arrangements, instead be mutually enhancing. For this reason, we place our project firmly within the anarchist tradition, heterodox though it may be. Sadly, however, most anarchist tendencies are nonetheless bogged down in delusory pseudoliberations.

The concept of social revolution has been with anarchism since its earliest days, being championed by such founding figures as Pyotr Kropotkin, Mikhail Bakunin, Emma Goldman, and Alexander Berkman. On the ethical basis that the current order is based on nearly-constant violence — however mediated, ritualized, and pacified it might be through law, economic exchange,

⁷ Spencer's maneuver is a good example of Roland Barthes' "Operation Margarine", in which one disingenuously and shallowly critiques something in order to ultimately redeem and defend it. Barthes details this phenomenon in a very short essay of the same name in his 1957 book *Mythologies*.

and social norms — many revolutionary anarchists have and do advocate for attentat, acts of symbolically powerful violence, such as the destruction of property or assassination of individuals perceived as key to the reigning order. Through this “propaganda of the deed,” anarchists intend to show that the status quo is not invincible and inevitable, to demonstrate to the everyperson that their latent rebellious sentiments are justified and shared by others, and to promote and generalize rebellious behavior.⁸

But a sober look at the history of revolutions does not reveal a great expansion of freedom, instead only revolutions in the modes of authority. The American Revolution traded one aristocracy for another, eventually producing what is arguably the most terroristic empire the world has ever known. The Haitian Revolution, a literal rising up of chattel slaves against their masters, led quickly from its success to the return of the plantation system they had rebelled against in the first place. The Russian and Chinese Revolutions traded the authority of *ancien régimes* for the tyranny of bureaucracy, surveillance, and police terror.

In an effort to distance themselves from this macabre history, many modern anarchists favor what they call *insurrection*, an entirely decentralized, leaderless mode of revolution based on attentat and propaganda. By avoiding the formation of formal parties or vanguards of any kind, the logic goes, there will be no authority to replace what is destroyed. The collapse of the social order, instead, will open the door for anarchy: the free life of human beings without authority.

But insurrectionism is afflicted with the most poisonous sort of magical thinking and optimism about human beings. For the insurrectionary anarchist’s praxis to be achieved, there must be some sort of tipping point at which the rebellion of an anarchist minority becomes generalized, taken up by large numbers of people — it could perhaps be only a small minority of the population, but this would nonetheless involve an enormous number of people who are not currently anarchists or political radicals of any kind, only people in whom, it is imagined, some latent, undertheorized radical instincts exist, waiting to be tapped into by the symbolic actions of the active, self-realized insurrectionary anarchists.

While a great many people are, no doubt, more or less dissatisfied with any number of aspects of the status quo, it is a tremendous and unfounded leap to imagine that they therefore are latent anarchists, only waiting to be tapped by some perfectly performed propaganda of the deed. Rather, the vast majority are afflicted with what Jason McQuinn has termed “Slave Syndrome” — an extrapolation from the idea of Stockholm Syndrome — in that they are deeply conditioned to identify with and act in their social roles, sculpted to have only a few of the skills necessary for survival through their occupations, and very likely to be woefully unprepared for and terrified by the idea of radically reconstructing every aspect of society (McQuinn).

For most people, their dissatisfaction with the status quo consists of wanting more commodities, more leisure, more prestigious and less onerous jobs, better prospects in society for their offspring, and so forth — these are not people who dream of profound transformations of the dominant culture. At best, we might say some significant number of people want a society that feels, in some vague and undertheorized way, more *fair* or *just*, which might translate into a lower disparity of wealth and an expansion of the welfare state. But how many people actually crave to give up cars, air conditioning, Netflix, pornography, and modern medicine? If they are

⁸ Exactly how much and what sort of violence is necessary or appropriate for social change has been debated fiercely by anarchists for the past century and a half, with positions taken ranging from pacifism (e.g., Leo Tolstoy) to deliberate terroristic violence (e.g., Luigi Galleani).

not willing, would the cadre of insurrectionaries then force such a change — or do they instead believe that they could recreate a society with high technology and luxury commodities that is, somehow, non-authoritarian and non-ecocidal?

Furthermore, the symbolic culture of society — its religions, myths, mores, notions of success, life cycle events, and so forth — provides most people with a much-needed shield of artificial meaning, protecting them from existential dread and the terror of death — they are thus attached psychically at a deep, partially unconscious level to their cultures: to bring an end to the expected functioning of society at large would entail coming to terms with the reality of one's life and choices as if for the first time, a potentially deeply traumatic experience.⁹

But even were the insurrectionary anarchist to somehow succeed in overthrowing the existent, they would still likely fail in their goals. Far from ushering in the freedom of anarchy, the creation of generalized social chaos that insurrectionary anarchists vie for will likely favor (and historically has favored) non-anarchist dissident factions, specifically the most ruthless and demagogical who wield the greatest ability and willingness to use organized violence. Whoever can quash their rivals and bring about security and access to resources for the many can bludgeon the population into going along with their new way of life whether many of them like it or not. The Leninists and Maoists whom the anarchists tend to despise — yet who are often in the streets with them during protests and riots — are quite honest with themselves and others about this and are willing to be those people. They also, unlike most anarchists, concertedly theologize their movements with a new collective mythos — through invocations of the People, the Revolution, the Communist Utopia, all of which are contortions of Christian themes¹⁰— to provide existential balm in a time of calamity. People who have been born and bred as slaves are far more likely to feel comfortable becoming a new kind of slave than to rise to the terrifying responsibility of freedom.

The revolutionary anarchist is thus selfnegating in their praxis. By making a revolution their telos, they delimit liberation to an almost perpetually-receding future moment, confined in the present to destabilizing their prisons — yet, historically, even in their moments of apparent victory, they find that their past efforts have only aided in the creation of their new incarceration.

Leviathan and the *Civitas*

If we eschew the illusions of reform and revolution, the politics of the Left and the Right, we arrive at a consistent critique and thus recognize our crisis for what it really is. Returning to the claim adumbrated at the outset, our crisis is not merely one of politics, society, or economics, but one of *civilization*, and our liberatory project is therefore not political, reformist, or revolutionary, but instead *anti-civilizational*.

To identify oneself and one's project as being *anti-civilizational* can come across as extreme, absurd, or even maudlin — what can it mean to be “against civilization”? Because of both the

⁹ This complex point is necessarily touched on only very briefly here. This phenomenon has been examined at length by numerous figures from different backgrounds, such as Émile Durkheim in *Suicide*, Peter Wessel Zapffe in “The Last Messiah,” and Ernest Becker in *The Denial of Death*, which led to the psychological concept of Terror Management Theory. I take up this specific issue from another angle in the essay ‘Existential Cowardice: Submission as Terror Management,’ printed in the forthcoming collection *The Prison Built by Its Inmates: Voluntary Servitude Revisited*, to be published by Enemy Combatant Publications.

¹⁰ The similarities among Left-wing politics, Secular Humanism, and Christian theology have been examined at

mutability of language and the ideological blinders nearly all of us accrue and so few of us shed, *civilization* means to many of us all that is good and decent about human sociality, typically contrasted with *barbarism* — thus, civilization is the rule of law in contrast to barbarism’s arbitrary tyranny, it is orderly cooperation rather than the chaotic “war of all against all,”¹¹ it is high art and culture in favor of brutish struggle for mere survival, and it is scientific discovery and technological sophistication against ignorance, superstition, and toil. Used in this commonplace way, *civilization* is more an ethical assertion — a claim about how one *ought* to live — than it is a descriptive one — a claim about how people *actually* do live. Even then, it is only a loose, obfuscatory sort of ethical claim, a kind of bromidic ideal, since every so-called civilization will necessarily feature a great deal of so-called barbarism.

In seeking to describe and understand our crisis, however, we will use civilization much more specifically and consistently. The term *civilization* comes from the Latin *civitas*, popularized in ancient Rome by the orator Cicero to describe the supposed implicit social contract to which all Roman citizens had agreed to as the basis of their coexistence. For Cicero, the *civitas* genuinely existed because people *believed* it existed: that they acted and thought in certain consistent ways in dealing with one another is all that civilization really was — it was, as we said at the outset, *a way of life and a way of seeing*. The *civitas* was thus not merely the city-state as a structure or as a population of citizens, but also the shared idea of the civic community, the mutually created and reinforced psychosocial construction of the city-state.

Following Cicero, by civilization, therefore, we refer to both the material and the psychic: civilization is sets of thoughts and gestures reproduced daily as a *whole form of life*, one that has developed only very recently and abruptly in the course of human existence. This way of life is characterized by the growth and maintenance of cities, with a city defined for our purposes as an area of *permanent human shelter with a dense and large population*. By being *permanent*, a city’s population cannot move in concordance with local ecological cycles, meaning it has to subsist in spite of them, against them. By being a *dense population*, a city’s inhabitants exceed the carrying capacity of their landbase, meaning they must import nutrients from a surrounding rural area typically characterized by agriculture as well as shuttle their wastes elsewhere lest they choke on them. By being a *large population*, citizens exceed the numbers possible for face-to-face and intimate community and therefore exist among strangers, whom they necessarily treat as abstract persons, not kin.

Psychically, civilized persons routinely *self-alienate* their life activity, taking aspects of their lives, powers, and phenomenality¹² and treating them as somehow alien or Absolute;¹³ they then

length by many, probably most originally and incisively by Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Stirner. For a more contemporary and approachable take on the influence of religion on politics, see John Gray’s *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*.

¹¹ This is the phrase used by Thomas Hobbes in his 1651 book *Leviathan* to describe what he imagined as the brutish state of uncivilized humans — Hobbes favorably juxtaposed a voluntary surrender of freedom to a powerful sovereign State, *Leviathan*. We follow the lead of libertarian thinkers like Ernst Jünger and Fredy Perlman who use Hobbes’ preferred term critically.

¹² By phenomenality, I mean what is variously called consciousness or subjective experience, that is, life as it is actually lived and felt, one’s own perspective with its sensory experience and inner life of emotions, thoughts, and imagination.

¹³ An Absolute is something imagined as a thing-in-itself, something that exists, in, of, and for itself irrespective of relations and perspectives, such as a transcendental deity, a god detached from the world we inhabit. My own philosophy is that no such Absolutes exist — they are dangerous philosophical delusions associated with ideologies of Slavery.

reify this imagined entity and submit to it as somehow superior or inevitable. In other words, an abstract idea dreamed up by an individual and reinforced through communication with others around them comes to be half-consciously or unconsciously treated as a concrete force. It is thus that we create this phantasmagoria of “fixed ideas”¹⁴ that seem to dominate and dictate our lives: deities, nationstates, social roles, the economy, the nuclear family, and so forth. The young man who loves his country — which for him is a haze of ideals, his-tory, and ethnicity — enlists, fights, and dies for the empire for whom he is a mere statistic. The mother, hypnotized by the ideal image of the happy family, slaves for her abusive husband and ungracious children, and then blames her own inadequacies when her actual life does not align with this reification.

In this reversal of the existentially-obvious state of affairs, these frozen concepts — which are merely abstractions, symbols, or models of actually-lived, sensual life — are delusorily treated as primary, more real and more powerful than the persons who in fact imagined and created them. Thus it is that, in civilization, people commonly believe themselves to be largely unable to create and live their lives on their own terms in free association with others, instead thinking and acting in these highly submissive and stiffened manners while surrounded by strangers with whom they tend to ritualistically and half-consciously reinforce these shared reifications — just as Cicero imagined in a positive light with his concept of the *civitas*. In this way, all civilizations, past and present, have been and continue to be founded on a high degree of (often subconscious or semiconscious) voluntary submission to authority.

A concrete example: the activity of *subsistence* — the creation of nourishment, shelter, medicine, and other essentials for survival from one’s habitat — which could be done through freely-chosen cooperation with others in a self-directed manner and in an unalienated relationship with the non-human world that supports us all, is instead highly mediated through the confining psychosocial infrastructure we call *the economy*. Because so many of us so often treat our social roles as workers and our abstraction of money as more real than our creative powers and ability to communicate and cooperate, enormous numbers of us submit to dangerous, toxic, humiliating, or simply tedious and unnecessary (Graeber) work, surrendering our agency to managers and investors who gain wealth off of our labor, in order to create commodities, goods and services that are detached from those who made them and then more or less passively consumed by others for the subsistence and recreation whose possibility for direct obtainment was prohibited by the time and effort spent working in the first place.

Materially, to varying degrees, civilized persons are *dispossessed* of the means to create their lives on their own terms. Numerous features of the world into which we are born — nonhuman organisms, land, water, minerals — are always already forbidden to us, having been ideologically recreated as State or private property, meaning people become dependent not on the living world, but on these mediating civilized institutions for their subsistence.

The history of civilization, as we will discuss throughout this journal, can be understood largely in terms of a not-entirely-linear, but nonetheless present, stepwise process of dispossession. In the very beginnings of civilization, with the emergence of the first lasting civilizations of Sumer, Egypt, and the Indus Valley, people were dispossessed of land and the fruits of their labor through taxation and theocratic ownership. AS civilizations have deepened and broadened, most people

¹⁴ This is the preferred phrasing of Max Stirner, whose 1844 book *The Unique and Its Property* is an early and excellent investigation into the authoritarian nature of reification. For a more contemporary take, see Jason McQuinn’s ‘Critical Self-Theory: The Non-Ideological Critique of Ideology’ in the third issue of the journal *Modern Slavery* from C.A.L. Press.

have come to own and/or have access to less and less land. Common stewardship of land used for food, natural medicines, and recreation has nearly disappeared, and the little remaining is often closely managed by State agents. Many people no longer even own their own homes, while those that do almost invariably have tiny parcels insufficient for subsistence. Now, we live in a world where one can step outside their home — which may be only rented from someone else or be in danger of being taken from them by a bank or government — to drive on roads that do not belong to them into cities full of stores with needed foods and goods taken from those who originally made them and available only for a price. Nearly the whole world is claimed as property, and it can only be accessed by the many who need it by performing the submissive behavioral rituals of civilization.

Thus, through self-alienation and dispossession acting in concert, civilized persons are reduced to a highly dependent relationship with the psychic and material institutions of civilization. Their life activities are no longer felt as their own, but have instead become ritualized, stiffened, dissociated from them, as though they were all merely playing a role in a greater body — it is the body of Leviathan, the State, whose function is to acquire and store material wealth, bring power and prestige to a few, wage war on competing Leviathans, and wreck the Earth all the while.

This situation, we contend, deserves the label slavery, with the recognition that slavery has existed in highly diverse, qualitatively distinct forms across civilized history: chattel slavery, concubinage, and indentured servitude, in which a person is more or less directly owned as property; debt, wage, and salary slavery, in which persons are parasitized indirectly through the control of money and property; and temple slavery, eunuchism, and social caste systems, in which persons are owned and Othered as a result of spiritual or religious belief systems.

Slavery is, for the purposes of our journal, *the sustained, ultimately violent parasitization of self-alienating and dispossessed persons*. This definition that we employ in this journal is an extension and modification of that on offer from celebrated historians of chattel slavery David Brion Davis and Orlando Patterson, who, despite their brilliance and erudition, cannot quite bring themselves to describe our present crisis as slavery — even when they come exceedingly close to doing so, going so far as to cite those who do — instead resorting to less inflammatory, more academic language like, “exploitation” or “bondage” (Davis 1966, Davis 1984, Patterson).

Thus, the anti-civilization critique goes far beyond that on offer by the Left, the Right, or the majority of anarchists. The old Left recognized class parasitization, but only recapitulated it through the creation of parties and bureaucracies; the new Left increasingly obscures even this basic insight under a panoply of particularized oppressions that are only the symptoms of a common slavery. The Right similarly obfuscates the issue by attempting to dissolve it into a common identity of nationalism. The anarchists come closest, but fail to sufficiently delve into either our crises material origins in agriculture and industrialism or their psychic origins in self-alienation, instead positing that a secularized millenarian deliverance will solve our crisis.

As we will explore in more detail in future issues, the further corollaries of the anti-civilization critique reveal that agriculture and industrialism necessarily entail a continual despoliation of the land and a resultant constant need to expand alongside an advancing wave of habitat destruction. The need to perpetually expand, due not only to despoliation but also typically rising populations, inevitably brings civilized peoples into conflict with other peoples (civilized or not) who occupy land into which they are expanding, typically resulting in war, genocide, assimilation, and further enslavement.

Thus, civilization is born in dispossession and reification, maintains itself through slavery and organized violence, and entails war and ecocide. To truly value individual freedom and joy, kinship and love among humans, intimacy with the beautiful nonhuman world, and psychic peace and clarity entails anti-civilization anarchy, the abandonment of the civilized way of life.

Desertion

Here we return to desertion, our invitation at the outset, as the beginning of the anti-civilization praxis, leading further to autarky and reinhabitation. This praxis will be developed both theoretically and practically in the course of this journal, and what follows is intended only as a primer and a further introduction of the themes of *Backwoods*.

By desertion, we mean moving toward the abandonment of civilization, both materially and psychically. Because civilization and the State are reproduced daily primarily through the submissive, undertheorized thoughts and gestures of the many — because civilization is first and foremost the *civitas* that we psychosocially create — it follows that we must unmake it through abandoning its lifeway. Material desertion means decreasing or eliminating dependence on civilized slave economies for one's subsistence — food, water, shelter, fuel, and medicine — in favor of its obtainment through direct interface with one's habitat individually or through voluntary cooperation in free association with others. Psychic desertion means the abandonment of the reified and submissive civilized slave ideologies on which the daily functioning of society is based; the alienated and false relationships of social scripts and roles; and the stupefying succor of delusory religions, pacifying entertainment, and commodity fetishism. Replacing this civilized worldview, I suggest, would mean in a nutshell the adoption of a philosophy of conscious self-ownership and personal liberation, the pursuit of openhearted relations based in mutuality and voluntary association in common projects, and the embrace of the hard truths of life with a sense of existentialism and personal honor rather than the comforting illusions civilization offers us as carrots for our submission. It would mean further a deep identification of oneself as part of the flesh of the world, as necessarily tied to the life of all other earthly beings — depending on one's ontological or metaphysical beliefs, this might mean an acknowledgement of the material codependency of all creatures in the biosphere, or coexistence with them as part of the *anima mundi*, or world-soul.

To anticipate the reformist critic of desertion: An immediate corollary of this view is that efforts at reforming society must be rejected as ultimately counterproductive. As was touched on above, civilization cannot be reformed into a benign lifeway for either humans or the wider living world, as it depends foundationally on slavery and irrevocably entails ecocide. We will examine in future issues how the promises of so-called *green energy*, *organic agriculture*, and other technical fixes cannot fundamentally alter this corrupt foundation — they presently function only to obscure it.

Moreover, civilization depends for its stability on reformers of all kinds to protect its human constituents and nonhuman victims from its worst excesses: social welfare protects against crippling destitution and its resultant social chaos, the expansion of civil rights neuters potentially dangerous underclasses and outlaws by allowing some of them to feel they suddenly have a stake in the preservation of the social order, environmental protection legislation means the poisoning and denuding of the biosphere to the point of uninhabitability will take a bit longer. The reformer, who might imagine himself the staunch social critic, is thus ironically civilization's most sincere

and adroit guardian. Nearly the same can be said of the revolutionary, who, as was discussed above, is a kind of aggressive hyperreformer, refusing incrementality in favor of a dramatic and immediate transformation of civilization. But the history of civilization is a history of its being reformed and revolutionized — indeed, progressive social reform was part of the very earliest States.¹⁵ We are officially told, and it is popularly believed, that we in the modern West live in the most reformed, enlightened, liberated civilizations that have ever existed (and in the United States, our civilization was born in revolution), yet these civilizations' ruling classes offer us nearly no influence whatsoever on policy decisions, surveil evermore of our lives, crush political dissent outside of narrowly permitted avenues, and have gutted the living world to nearly its last breath — such are the fruits of reform and revolution.

To anticipate the anarchist critic: desertion does not necessarily imply that all forms of *attentat* are to be rejected outright; but it does mean a profound reevaluation of what some anarchists have vaguely taken to calling “attack,” which I feel has been greatly exaggerated in importance, often very misguidedly conducted, commonly easily recuperated by the parasitic social classes, and woefully overshadowing what ought to be the primary goals of desertion, autarky, and reinhabitation. It is only an empty bluff, or a suicidal and mass homicidal impulse, to prioritize attacking civilization when oneself and one's kin totally depend on its infrastructure and social relations for their survival.

It may very well be necessary and appropriate to resist more confrontationally at certain junctures, but much of anarchist activity these days is a repetitive exercise in self-righteous victimhood, a perpetual motion machine animated by a resentment-fueled martyr complex: rioting, aggressively confronting police, destroying public and private property — all of which accomplish next to nothing when civic and economic activity returns to normalcy one or several days later, but which often result in arrests, fines, incarceration, and injury for the activists involved. One attempts to assault directly an enemy who is best equipped and enormously accustomed to absorb and/or crush direct assaults, knowing that they will likely only inflict superficial scratches on their enemy while risking the total destruction of their lives — only a virulently self-sacrificial morality that places catharsis over wisdom could motivate such behavior. One loses, but feels vindicated, justified, and redeemed in their loss, and the oppression they receive only proves their dedication to righteousness and the turpitude of their enemies — and so the cycle continues.

At best, rioting may pressure politicians to pass certain reforms, which means one has fallen perfectly back into the trap of reformism. Again, there may be a time and place for certain very specific forms of sabotage and attack, but the greatest destabilization to the dominant paradigm will likely be caused by civilization's own selfundermining productive processes. In any case, desertion does harm the ruling order by depriving it of the resource on which it totally depends: the daily submission of slaves.

In almost all cases, desertion will not and cannot be quick or total, but it can nonetheless meaningfully be incremental and partial, pushing toward ever-greater withdrawal as deserters come together, share skills and inspiration, and create informal networks of mutual aid. This journal is, among other things, intended as an organ for the creation of such networks.

¹⁵ Consider the reign of Urukagina, the *ensi* (ruler) of the city-state of Lagash in 24th-century B.C. in Mesopotamia, who might be civilization's first progressive reformist authoritarian.

Autarky

In reciprocity with desertion is autarky, the knowledge and practice of providing one's subsistence — again, food, water, shelter, fuel, and medicine — for and by oneself in an unalienated relationship with one's habitat and in voluntary cooperation with others with whom one freely associates. Desertion, if it is not to be suicidal, is only possible in proportion with one's practice of autarky; and, in turn, a true engagement with autarky prefigures and implies desertion.

The economy of capitalist modernity, with its imposed division of labor and its thanatotic evisceration of the living world, pressures us into lifestyles that are psychically and materially distant from our habitats and into occupations in which we tend to learn only a small number of skills related to survival — and perhaps not even that. Pursuing autarky thus implies a rejection of this hyperspecialization in favor of a profound reskilling, a regaining of the venerable and valuable skills of foraging, tending, tracking, hunting, fishing, preserving, woodworking, herbalism, and others that were, until very recently, so common among humans.

Recalling McQuinn's "Slave Syndrome" mentioned above, because the hyperspecialization of our bondage has meant that most of these skills have been so foreign to us for all of our lives, the prospect of learning them and doing all of the activities necessary for living ourselves may be intimidating, even terrifying, such that we may retreat into the false, cloying comfort of servitude in which we purchase blessed ignorance at the price of freedom. Autarky means contesting this submissiveness with the assertion that regaining these skills is not an unfortunate burden necessary for freedom, but instead an enriching of life and an enhancement of personal power — using, and thus strengthening, both body and mind in a variety of ways is a joyful fulfillment of our full capacities as organisms.

Throughout this journal, we will examine *forest gardening* as a methodology of achieving autarky. Through its practice, one can gain subsistence from the land without the ecocide and drudgery of agriculture, enriching the land for not only human, but also nonhuman, purposes and thus achieving a kind of agricultural counterrevolution. We at *Backwoods* are thus not only true radicals — in the sense of looking to understand and address the radix, or root, of our crisis — but also the truest form of reactionaries.

Reinhabitation

Reinhabitation is the outcome of desertion and autarky. Anarchist Emma Goldman referred to a liberated existence as "simpler, but far deeper and richer"¹⁶ - I say that this is the essence of reinhabitation. It is, in the most profound sense, *being somewhere*. It is shaping and feeding the landbase as the landbase feeds and shapes you, consciously being part of the interconnected senses and metabolic processes of one's ecosystem, coparticipating with other creatures to tend to the whole that sustains us all. Against the globalism of modernity, we assert a return to *place*.

Autarky is possible as a lone individual, but its solo pursuit is both more difficult and more joyless than when done cooperatively. Moreover, as primates, we crave companionship and are most vivacious when nourished by intimate relationships — a sense of *place* requires a sense of belonging. The anthropologist Robin Dunbar, through a study of human behavior and neurobi-

¹⁶ To be clear, Emma Goldman's comment was particular to her vision of life for liberated women, but it applies just as well generally.

ology, has suggested that humans are cognitively equipped to function in group sizes of around one hundred and fifty individuals, a number that we seem to subconsciously gravitate toward in activities that require a high level of trust, efficiency, and self-organization to be performed well.¹⁷ Agreeing with but going beyond Dunbar, I would say that it is only in sustained, regular, faceto-face contact that deep empathy can be fostered and maintained — this is how we evolved and how we have spent most of our existence as humans, in what anthropologists refer to as *band societies*. Humans are certainly capable of compassion and mutuality; but the tragic history of civilizations incontrovertibly shows us the human capacity for astonishing cruelty and wantonness when other humans and nonhumans can be treated not as sentient beings but as abstractions and aliens. Ours is the era of false communities: we are told, and popularly believe, that we are members of nations, citizens of cities, followers of religions — but most of us live among strangers, with shallow or nonexistent relationships with those near whom we live, with whom we work, and whom we pass on the street.

To truly flourish as organisms in communion with our habitats, we must live in a way that nourishes the human psyche: in small, sustained, face-to-face, autarkic communities of kinship. In such a lifeway, it would be possible to know everyone's story, to count on one another, to live without fear of one another, and to be united in a common purpose as what one might call a band society, or, less preferably, a family or tribe.¹⁸ Such a group would not be a suppression of individuality through stifling and incessant collectivism, but in fact the terrain on which a true union of individualities could grow, as the ethnographic record of such band societies suggests (Berezkin, Clastres, Kaczynski, Turnbull).

Averse to utopic thinking, we recognize as philosophical pessimists that human conflict and suffering are perennial — but this perspective only furthers the case for the superiority of this lifeway. Surrounded by lifelong companions, one can face misfortune with the support and compassion of loved ones. Facing the ineradicable difficulties of life and its hard choices, one can be challenged by friends to rise to the occasion, eschew weakness and excuses, and be encouraged to actualize their potential. A culture of ethics, honor, and accountability can only be fostered and maintained through the combination of loving and shaming that comes from sustained intimacy — our culture of late modernity, where one can disappear into anonymity and find a new social group at the first sign of conflict or disappointment, is the grotesque antithesis of healthful human relations. How much of human misery today is a result of loneliness, fear of abandonment,

¹⁷ Dunbar initially arrived at the number by noticing a positive relationship between the neocortex size of primates and the size of their social groups — he posited that the relationship may be causal and extrapolated from it that human neocortex size suggested a stable social group of one hundred and fifty. Subsequently, he bolstered the theory with empirical data based on numerous human groups that maintained relationships and/or worked together closely across space and time, from military units to factory workers to the number of holiday greeting cards families send. Dunbar's theory has come under criticism on a number of fronts that strike me as picking out serious weaknesses, such as the observation that social insects, with relatively tiny brains, live in societies with their own sophisticated micro-politics — my position does not depend on it being literally true, but only on its being a conceptual guidepost for what is also known phenomenologically.

¹⁸ Band, although colloquially odd, is the preferred term among anthropologists for small, face-to-face communities, and it is thus the term we will use in *Backwoods*. Although terminological distinctions are not entirely consistent across anthropological literature, tribe is generally used to pick out groups sufficiently large as to no longer be bound by faceto-face communication and kinship ties, and instead bound through small political institutions and roles like councils of elders, big men, or chiefs — for us, such groups, while still decidedly anti-authoritarian relative to States, are already past the point of anarchy and not part of our goal. Going beyond anthropological accuracy, “tribe” and “family” are to us laden with New Age and cult associations — band is thus decidedly the best term.

sexual poverty and jealousy, or isolation in times of crisis? Finally, the psychopathic and socially parasitic tendencies of human beings are best addressed by face-to-face, small-scale relations in which dominators and exploiters have no police and armies to manipulate and hide behind, no religious or political ideologies to rationalize their rapacity, and no mass anonymity to obscure to themselves their own naked predaceousness — such parasites could be confronted immediately and directly by a group who could count on one another, which is indeed what happens in such cultures. Against the mass anonymity of modernity, we assert that reinhabitation implies a return to the intimacy of the *band society*.

Belonging and place cannot be truly realized unless and until human communities choose as groups of individuals to consciously relinquish the intoxicated fantasy of human supremacy and relate to the community of beings around them not as owners, managers, or stewards, but instead as cocreators. The earliest-known monumental religious architecture appears to depict humans mastering dangerous animals, and signs of agriculture and animal husbandry developed around the monument not long after its creation (Mann). If religion and agriculture began the human separation from the community of beings by suggesting that the human was spiritually distinct and materially capable of restructuring whole ecosystems for its gain, this separation only deepened with the Abrahamic religions that desacralized and profaned the living world in favor of the supernatural and otherworldly. The secularization brought on by Humanism and scientism deepened it further by positing the world was composed of dead, unfeeling, rationally manipulable matter to be put in service to human civilization. Thus comes our present era of the pathological rationalism of techno-industrialism and consumerism, where toxic lakes are created as byproducts for the production of smartphones with which bored, lonely people diddle away their lives (Maughan). The greatest fruits of our separation from our living kin have been mass extinction, existential anxiety, and a menagerie of stupefying entertainment commodities — against this hubris and death, we assert the return to a self-conscious *animality*.

Our Invitation

To put things only a bit simplistically, we must ask ourselves questions about how we truly want to live in the near future: Will the human being be nothing but a function, a mere epiphenomenon of vast political and social forces, a residue of commodity production and consumption? Or will the human being be an existentialist at the center of her own life, a creature who coparticipates in the creation and consumption of her habitat, an animal among a world she senses as kin? These questions imply profoundly different values, and the outcomes of pursuing them could not be more different.

Through the way of life called civilization, we have become parasites of one another and a cancer to the broader biosphere. The modern human is a tragicomic caricature: a creature who cannot so much as eat or shit without plugging into one of the apertures of a vast, world-eating industrial infrastructure; a creature whose capacities are daily diminished and who is evermore humiliated and moronized by the latest consumerist excrescence, from automated salt-shakers and “organic water” to hiring fake friends to appear in “selfies” taken by that apotheosis of anomie, the smartphone; and a creature for whom the emptiness and ennui of his life is so obvious and incontrovertible that it can only be drowned by ceaseless and shallow distraction. The gravity of our error has been plain for centuries; it is time to turn away.

The present situation is grim: the forces of the parasitic classes are vast, submission and resignation are widespread, and the biosphere is, by some estimates, already irrevocably in a mass extinction spiral. But whether we deserters are so fabulously successful as to initiate a widespread secessionist movement, or so insignificant as to make merely “pockets of happiness” that quickly pass away after our deaths, I believe the choice is clear. It is a modern, utilitarian moral calculus that measures the value of a course of action in terms of its expected quantitative consequences, and thus elicits the dismissive scoff at the possible insignificance of a relatively small number of deserters scattered around the world. For many of the ancients, as well as modern iconoclasts, value and meaning are found instead in the individual’s own sense of virtue, all the more so in the face of tragedy. Exactly what such a virtue ethic might be in this late period of civilization will be developed throughout this journal, but the values espoused throughout this piece are a first glimpse.

Thus, our invitation to all those who can hear it: Refuse the submissive values and false hopes of the dominant ideologies; follow the implications of radical critique — say and live what you know to be true. Refuse the slavery of being a mere appendage of Leviathan — take back your life. Refuse the cancerousness of technoindustrial-agricultural life — pursue mutuality with the living world and rediscover your animality.

Notes

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Bellamy Fitzpatrick
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Corrosive Consciousness, Part I

How One Might Profane Green Platonism

Bellamy Fitzpatrick

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[Editors' Note: This is a selection from a failed debate with Kevin Tucker intended to be published in issue #2 of Black & Green Review. KT rejected this because he desired the debate to be constrained to the question of egoism (pro or con) and the author desired to make a broader case. We will publish the rest of this argument, the positive case for egoism, in Black Seed #5.]

“The primal war is a spiritual war. It began as the spirit of wildness was buried [...]”

- Kevin Tucker, “Egocide”

“To be sure, to speak of spirit and the good as Plato did meant standing truth on her head and denying perspective itself, the basic condition of all life”

- Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good And Evil

The history of Western philosophy can be divided, very crudely but nonetheless meaningfully, into two broad strands depending on assumptions, or lack thereof, about lived experience. One tendency - calling itself in various incarnations Realism, Christianity, scientific materialism, and so forth - begins not from the real of our lived experience but instead with a presupposition about what the world is really like, positing something greater, deeper, or truer than what we feel. It follows from a presupposition like this one that our lived experience is only a pale reflection or echo of what is seen as the fundamental truth. This speculative, reifying mode “finds its origin in Platonic philosophy and has been dominant from the very beginning.”

I will call this mode of thinking, broad and varied as it is, Platonism for the purpose of this essay, as I think its roots are meaningful and highlight its tendency towards reification and morality.

The second tendency - a perpetual minority that has been called or has called itself perspectivism, egoism, existentialism, nihilism, and other names - considers phenomenality, lived experience, to be prior to and to take precedence over any such reifying speculation. Knowledge and value come from phenomenality, are felt in the flesh, and are always instrumental and provisional rather than aiming at an imagined ultimate, objective reality disembodied from moment-to-moment existence. I will in this part of the essay analyze Anarcho-Primitivism from this perspective; in part two, I will argue that this second tendency is an essentially anarchist mode of thinking.

Exiting the Madhouse: Moving Toward a Truly Critical Theory

“Man, your head is haunted [...] I regard those persons who cling to the Higher... almost the whole world of men, as veritable fools, fools in a madhouse.”

- Max Stirner, The Ego And Its Own

The madhouse is civilization and the fools are those who, not only in their actions, thinking, and language; but also, unfortunately, in their critical theory, spend a great deal of their activity reproducing it every day.

History is rife with examples of critical theory that purport to liberate humans (and, rarely, nonhumans) from domination, exploitation, and alienation. Nearly all of them, however, criticize “particular forms of enslavement merely in order to substitute other forms of enslavement”. In order to be consistently and thoroughly liberatory, then, a critical theory cannot simply effectively

critique one aspect of civilization or a particular manifestation of it, nor can it stop at critiquing every aspect and manifestation of all extant and historical civilizations.

Instead, thoroughgoing critical theory must effectively critique all possible forms of domination, exploitation, and alienation - it must provide a moment-to-moment practice of critique that allows for perpetual yet always provisional analysis leading to potentially immediate action. In doing so, it allows one to be critical not only of present civilizations, but also possible future iterations of domination and exploitation, the reemergence of alienated lifeways and modes of thought, and the inadequacies of present and future partial liberation theories.

Anarcho-Primitivism (AP) - in spite of contributing importantly to the anti-civilization critique - fails in this regard because it does not break free of the speculative Platonic tendency, that essentially civilized mode of thinking. AP therefore seeks totalizing truths that render the world absolutely knowable, recapitulating an ideology of control and measurement; draws sacred moral lines where they do not exist in the biosphere; posits objective and transcendental values and entities, reifying aspects of our phenomenality; and succumbs to the same dualistic logic that has characterized classical anarchism. I will examine only a few specific instances of these issues here, due to constraints of scope: the vagaries of domestication, the mystification and sacralization of wildness, and the Manichaeism that motivates and unites both.

The Vagaries of Domestication

It is seductive to talk of domestication in anarchist theory: it applies ideas of domination we have already come to understand in a new dimension. The idea that our present crisis is caused by dominating Nature - or burying the spirit of wildness, as you prefer - implies, when it is not already explicitly stated, that we might exit this nightmare by simply learning how to stop dominating and somehow negating those who refuse to stop. It is thus a recapitulation of egalitarian tendencies of thought that consider liberation to be tantamount to the elimination of power. It is easy to talk to anarchists about power; for many, it is already a placeholder for bad. Indeed, Tucker, at the 2014 Philadelphia Anarchist Bookfair, summarized anarchist theory as the search to identify and eliminate power; green anarchy's contribution, he continued, has been identifying that power with agriculture, with domestication - it is a pleasingly elegant, readily comprehensible critique that implies the familiar Manichaean theme.

To effectively avoid doing something, one needs to know clearly what it is; but when it comes to defining domestication, APs have been vague, tending toward moralistic, quasi-religious, and maudlin language. John Zerzan has defined it at his most sober as "the attempt to bring free dimensions under control for self-serving purposes" and elsewhere, with metaphysical adventurousness, as "a cosmic change" - sacred lines are being crossed, one is to understand. Kevin Tucker has been more erratic, either clearly defining or vaguely gesturing at domestication in a wide variety of ways:

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Though Kevin at times appears very conscious of the accusations of religiosity that have fallen on AP, he nonetheless endorses Chellis Glendinning by saying "the original trauma of domestication is a deep wound". Here, domestication is perhaps our Fall.

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Elsewhere, he seems to agree with Zerzan's "cosmic change", describing it as relating to metaphysical erasure or transformation: "Domestication is the destruction of the soul." or "Domesticated plants and animals replace wildness."

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Domestication also seems at times to be naturalized, synonymous with socialization, as when "Our submission to the system is our domestication", described as "the internalized system: the cop, missionary, politician, economist, and worker in our heads".

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Most mundanely, Kevin often refers to dependency, perceived dependency, and control to characterize domestication.

How is domestication so many different things? If it is, then is it actually a useful term? At times, domestication is even contradictory things, as when "Our own self domestication has not changed who we are[!]" - so it does not seem to create or prescribe different metaphysical categories, after all - or "domestication is not some monolithic and irreversible event in the past, but a constant reality that we recreate daily through our own lives" - and so it is therefore not an original trauma or Fall, which is a decidedly singular event.

Domestication, then, as Kevin deploys it, is a *margarine-word*, a word "whose function is to circulate, not to mean". It is used less to convey information than to indicate the user holds a certain moral position. This residue gleams clearly in certain moments, as when Kevin writes: "The one message that I hope people can learn from the history of domestication is that humans, like any other animal, aren't meant to control the world around it [sic] and dictate its relationships." There are things we must not do, and one of them is to control the world around us; but the phrase "control the world" is as vague as "domestication".

We co-create one another's worlds: my phenomenality is inseparable from myself—it constitutes me—and I am therefore a multifarious being composed of every other being that I encounter. Intimacy and symbiosis are co-creation, meaning that creatures are continually shaping one another. But this cocreation is not a lack of control or a surrender of power, it is a simultaneous competition and cooperation of powers. Do we not all control each other's worlds, as we are the constituents of one another's worlds? Where does symbiosis end and domestication begin?

I have written elsewhere in greater length and depth that power, control and interdependence as well as more one-sided dependence are rampant among nonhumans: orchids sexually deceive their pollinators, parasitic barnacles castrate their hosts and hijack their reproductive organs, and leafcutter ants engage in quasi-agriculture. Through co-evolution and symbiosis, species are constantly shaping and influencing each other.

I thus cannot take seriously the idea that power, control and dependency are what problematize inter-organismal relationships. A Foucauldian analysis of power, normally understood in terms of inter-human relationships, seems equally applicable to ecology: exertions of power characterize all interactions and are inescapable - indeed, Stirner and Nietzsche seem to have understood beings as iterations of force and the act of being alive as consisting of exertions of power, the cessations of which is one's death. Rather than run from power, control, and dependency, drawing nonsensical, life-denying barriers around them; we might instead acknowledge and seek to understand our power over other organisms, how we are shaping them and they us. It is not that "everything is bad, but that everything is more dangerous", and we may thus move toward a "hyper—and pessimistic" awareness of what our power means and how it can be more life-affirming.

Other takes on ecology contrast with Kevin's moralistic one - that seeks, Platonically, to carve nature into joints, the good and the bad - and refuse this dualism. Permaculturist Bill Mollison famously argued that everything gardens, that is, every organisms exerts power to create a favorable environment for itself: the bacterium *Lactobacillus*, for one, shifts lactic acid that favors itself and its conspecifics but inhibits the growth of many competing molds and bacteria—this act is power, this act is an effort “to control the world [...] and dictate its relationships.” Former Animal Liberation Front member Rod Coronado spoke in an interview conducted by Tucker of being inspired by the way predators exert a domineering presence. Nietzsche saw life as continually overcoming itself, always surging forth in new forms. When I envision the ichneumon wasp injecting its eggs and mutualistic viruses into a host, seizing control of its body, I am moved similarly to see a kind of ecstatic and violent act of life overcoming itself.

I of course agree with Tucker that there is a horrific dimension to many of our human-nonhuman relationships; certainly, he is getting at something important. To tease out what this horror is more empirically and less morally, we might paraphrase permaculturist Toby Hemenway's definition of agriculture: the process by which ecosystems are annihilated and turned into human beings and their domesticates, resulting in an economic surplus that encourages the creation of rulers to oversee it, slaves to harvest it, bureaucrats to measure it, guards to protect it, and an ideology to rationalize the whole disgusting process. And there our focus is revealed: it is not the hazy act of domestication, inveigled as it is with co-evolution and symbiosis and fraught with vague and moralistic condemnations like dependence and control; rather, it is the social and ecological relationships that emerge from certain forms of power exertion that are problematic. The recent anarchist interest in M. Kat Anderson's *Tending the Wild* and the likes of permaculturists like Hemenway, Mollison, and Fukuoka seems to be a healthy recognition of the fact that high levels of human-nonhuman co-creation, control, coevolution, and interdependence are not only inescapable but also not necessarily undesirable, as they need not engender the massive biotic denuding, exploitation, and alienation that characterize civilization.

The Elusive and Sacred Wilderness

“When we learn to open ourselves to wildness [...] the organic anarchy of our beings will flow.”

“That spirit is what connects an individual to the [...] wildness around them.”

“wildness that flows between living beings”

- Kevin Tucker, *For Wildness And Anarchy*

“Constantly regard the universe as one living being, having one substance and one soul [...] and how all things act with one movement; and how all things are the cooperating causes of all things that exist”

- Marcus Aurelius, *Stoic Emperor of Rome*

As a foil to domestication, Tucker frequently evokes “wildness”, which exhibits the same slippery qualities of seeming to define decidedly different things. With possible self-transparency and hesitation, Tucker often deploys the word with a vanguard and rearguard of qualifiers and negative descriptions. Nevertheless, the positive descriptions or gestures shift freely between vastly different ontological realms. As above with domestication, I briefly explore a few here:

-
Sometimes, wildness seems to refer to a feral, unsocialized state or act: “we fear the wildness we are born into [...] such a savage, primal state”.

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Though Tucker expresses an allergy to “new age oneness”, he nonetheless also seems to be positing some kind of universalizing force or essential connective substance as when he refers to “that spirit is what connects an individual to the [...] wildness around them.” and “wildness that flows between living beings” - at times, it is even composed of divisible units, “pieces of wildness”.

-
And though Tucker agrees with me that “There is no ‘Nature’, alone and isolated outside of our grasp”, he does not shy away at times from describing wildness as some elusive, essential substance of the world, perhaps independent of any given being as when there is “a war against looming wildness”, one fought against “the state of wildness”, being lost as “there isn’t enough wildness left [...] wildness is running thin”.

Wildness, then is anything from a propositional attitude to a quintessence of life that is definitively out there, capable of being tapped into or destroyed. I have had occasion on Free Radical Radio to point out that, at his most metaphysically adventurous, Tucker sounds like nothing quite so much as the Classical Stoics, quoted in the epigram, who believed in, among many other things, living well by aligning oneself with Nature. I have noted in those same episodes how Nietzsche so effectively ridiculed this notion:

“You desire to LIVE ‘according to Nature’? [which is] boundlessly extravagant, boundlessly indifferent, without purpose or consideration, without pity or justice, at once fruitful and barren and uncertain [...] how COULD you live in accordance with such indifference? [...] Is not living valuing, preferring, being unjust, being limited, endeavouring to be different? [...] In reality, however, it is quite otherwise with you: while you pretend to read with rapture the canon of your law in Nature [...] In your pride you wish to dictate your morals and ideals to Nature, to Nature herself, and to incorporate them therein [...]”

The idea of living according to some abstracted idea of life, biology, or Nature—be it Stoicism, biocentrism (Tucker’s other preferred term), universal love, or wildness—places one in a peculiar ethical paradox. One wants not to be anthropocentric or in line with The Culture, opposed as these are to Nature, and so one attempts to give oneself over to the way of Life or the Universe. But Life is not actually a coherent, consistent entity that always strives toward the Good, in spite of Tucker’s assertion that Nature plays the part of protagonist: though at times its acts are “unpredictable and chaotic”, we can count on its consistency as “The only thing they will do for sure is catalyze the life cycles of all living things.”

In contrast to Tucker’s Platonic portrayal of it, the biosphere is a complex of biota and abiota that are not only often beautiful, rich, stable, and fertile; but also often indifferently destructive and contradictory. Cyanobacteria, the first photosynthetic organism, may have wiped out most life on Earth 2.3 billion years ago by filling the world with atmospheric oxygen, then toxic to most organisms, and went on to create a 300 million year ice age during which even the ocean surface may have been slush. Paleontologist Peter Ward, noting that several similarly apocalyptic events have happened, has put forth the Medea Hypothesis, suggesting that multicellular life is essentially self-destructive and therefore periodically annihilates itself. When philosophers talk

about aligning themselves with Nature or Life, they pretend that cyanobacterial nigh-omnicide does not exist; they focus instead on the interconnectedness of trees and mycorrhizal fungi.

The effort to cease being anthropocentric, then, ends up merely recapitulating anthropocentrism by picking and choosing the aspects of the nonhuman world tht humans want to emulate. And why should we be afraid of this evaluation, as Nietzsche said, for is the act of living not one of moment-to-moment evaluation? APs, like all Platonists, seem to fear that a lack of objective, transcendental value would entail either a total devaluation of the world or else a complete arbitrariness about what has value — if we do not enshrine Nature, wildness, Life, or something as the Good, and especially if we show that Nature et al. sometimes do pointless and destructive things, then it follows for them, that there would be no good reason we should not jsut continue to monotonously and immiseratingly denude the biosphere. But this conclusion does not necessarily follow.

The cyanobacterial annihilation of most life was one articulation of life's possibilities, just as the present civilized annihilation of much of the organic is another — as a unique, evaluating being, I am fully prepared to say, unhesitatingly, that I prefer certain assemblages to others. Such an act could be called anthropocentric in its refusal to defer to some imagined, unified will or objective value of biocentrism or Nature; but I would call it simply a unique, entirely perspectival and personal evaluation, as it defers to neither an imagined totality of nature nor to any variation of humanism.

The Persistence of Manichaeism

“the primal war: the refusal and resistance to domestication wherever and whenever it has imposed itself on life and the world.”

- Kevin Tucker, “Agents of Change: Primal War and the Collapse of Global Civilization”

Both wildness and domestication, then, seem to be vague predicates referring more or less ambiguously to Platonic Forms. Domestication gestures at a certain social and ecological relationship, but suggests than an exertion of power is the primary problem. Wildness refers to some will of or essential rightness of Nature. Domestication and wildness, then, refer primarily to moral categories, diametrically opposed, and AP insistence on using them has the function of framing the world as a cosmic battlefield between essentially opposed forces.

In this way, Tucker has not departed categorically from classical anarchists, in that he frames the struggle of anarchism in a Manichaean schema that sees wildness, nature, and humanity in a moral-cosmological struggle with domestication, civilization, and the capitalist state. It is replete with a Rapture event, the Collapse, that replaces Revolution; and a resentment aimed at “the domesticators”, who are our nouveaux-bourgeoisie. Tucker, in spite of significantly different particulars, is thus in the basic logic of his thinking in alignment with Bakunin, who understood anarchism as the struggle of natural authority against artificial authority, the former not being oppressive because its laws “are not extrinsic in relation to us, they are inherent in us, they constitute our nature, our whole being physically, intellectually and morally.”

We are thus left with a decidedly submissive logic predicated on an externalized value, defined both in submission to an abstract Platonic authority, nature or wildness, as well as through

ressentiment toward the domesticators and civilization; we have the same self-diminution with respect to Good and Evil. This leaves one with the same deference to reification that has characterized all of civilization, precipitated its creation, and crippled the majority of critical theories waged against it.

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To Love The Inhuman

a critique of John Zerzan's "Animal Dreams"

Bellamy Fitzpatrick

2016

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“Faced with the meaninglessness of the world – the real[...] the individual most often quakes and turns away. The experience of the real is literally unbearable, and philosophy has traditionally come to the rescue to save humanity from meaninglessness, to create the illusion of a truth...”

– David F. Bell, introduction to

Joyful Cruelty by Clément Rosset

Anarcho-Primitivist¹ John Zerzan’s thinking exemplifies just such an attempt at rescue, one not only unnecessary, but in fact unwanted, for an anti-civilization critique lived as a joyful life. This essay examines John Zerzan’s recent *“Animal Dreams”*, first situating it in a typical anarchist critique motivated through the enshrinement of particular reifications, then exploring how such action leads to Manichaeian thinking [*ed. – i.e. that breaks everything down into good or evil, light or dark, or love and hate (named after an Iranian prophet Mani): essentially, dualistic thinking*], and finally challenging specific claims made within his essay. An alternative mode of relating to the nonhuman closes the piece.

Tenacious Spectres: Morality & Nature

Radicalization, that is, the development of one’s critical theory, can be understood largely in terms of dispossession by reification²; as one’s critique grows sharper, one increasingly liberates one’s life from these enslaving concepts. All anarchists worth the name have dispelled themselves of State, most have excised Capitalism and God, and many have also banished such subtle ghosts as Family and Production – but some, as a result of their radicalization, not only fail to dispel, but actually enshrine all the more fiercely, Morality and Nature.

Moral socialization is an odd, dissonant thing in the dominant culture. Children are taught at an early age to share, to treat others as they would like to be treated (the Golden Rule), to believe everyone’s opinions are of value, and similar maxims according to the altruistic paradigm generally descended from Christian and Enlightenment [*ed. – see ‘A Profound Dis-ease’*] beliefs, even if those value tables are never explicitly cited during this socialization. Simultaneous to this incul-

¹ ed. – Despite finding quite a bit of common ground with some who describe themselves as “primitivists”, we have a strong dislike for the terminology itself. The notion that the lifeways of pre-industrial peoples were “primitive” is present-centric, reductionist, and (if we measure ‘complexity’ in terms not defined by the dominant techno-logic and recognise the depth of methods and rituals employed by such peoples) simply inaccurate. Primitivists also often display a tendency to cherry-pick the parts deemed ‘relevant’ (in a utilitarian sense) to an anarcho-primitivist ideology while ignoring or underplaying the many other parts which said cultures used to understand and navigate their world; an operation more befitting colonialism and its particular scientific gaze. Additionally, this framing runs into the immediate problem of surviving cultures which are not civilised: “The use of the term “primitive” – which means “first” or “early” – for societies that have existed into modern times without developing civilization carries some questionable assumptions. How can societies that exist now be “first” or “early”? Did they just now appear? In a living world that is in constant flux, have they somehow remained static and unchanging? Can human development only happen one way – as the development of civilization? Besides, which of these societies is the genuine “primitive” one? They are certainly not all alike, or even all that similar. Homogeneity is a trait of civilization, not of these other social realities” (Wolfgang Ivers).

² Reification is a term that has been used in closely related, but nonetheless significantly different ways in the history of critical theory. A particularly well-developed definition is articulated by Jason McQuinn in his “Critical Self-Theory” essay in the third issue of *Modern Slavery*, too lengthy to cite in its entirety here. Going beyond the typical understanding of reification as the phenomenon in which an abstract idea is concretized, McQuinn notes that reification “includes two correlative moments[...] On the one side an activity is reduced to a passive object, and on the other side the activity that is removed from the then passively-constructed object is projected onto a symbolic agent.”

cation is children's experience of realities often at odds with the prescriptions they receive: they see not only the concerted exploitation of the majority by the few, but also commonplace avarice among the many; they see the obvious destitution of some, often disproportionately along visually recognizable demographic lines; and they see women's opinions more or less subtly devalued in quotidian conversation. This dissonance stirs feelings of moral distress that need some form of catharsis. For some, this release is a naturalization of perceived evils, perhaps via an unknowable divine plan, a misanthropic dismissal of humanity as essentially flawed, or a self-identification with Social Darwinism. Others, though, balk at the horrorshow, as their rationalization of the dissonance is that Morality's normative purchase is genuine and reality is simply out of step with it; they demand either a sweeping change or annihilation of the status quo and the earthly manifestation of heaven. Pyotr Kropotkin³, an inspirational figure to many radicals, preaches with precisely this kind of moral indignation: *"Our principles of morality say: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'; but let a child follow this principle and take off his coat to give it to the shivering pauper, and his mother will tell him that he must never understand moral principles in their direct sense. If he lives according to them, he will go barefoot, without alleviating the misery around him! Morality is good on the lips, not in deeds."*

Thus, *the process of radicalization for many is the moral impugnement of the world.* Though I am unaware of any empirical study, it has been my own experience (and, I suspect, that of most readers) that the vast majority of radicals born into the dominant culture were at least initially radicalized in this manner, typically as especially indignant progressive liberals, and the majority of this set still occupy that analytical space, having only clarified their morality. Morality's ontological status is never called into question; indeed, in its besiegement by either the openly immoral or the falsely moral – i.e., *greed is good* or *people need authority* or *we would have the war of all against all* – amidst an obviously bleak culture, it is all the more vindicated as the Real, the Good, and the True.

In the same vein is the burgeoning anti-civilization anarchist who sees, on the one hand, the culture in which they are forcibly immersed, with its multifarious horrors of dehumanization, objectification, wilted affect, wanton waste, variegated and abundant interhuman oppression, and denuding of the Biosphere; and then sees, seemingly diametrically opposed, the nonhuman world with its vivaciousness, intimacy, immediacy of experience, nutrient and energy cycles in which nothing is wasted or wanted but the energy that the Sun or hydrothermal vents replace, various niches through which all lifeways are valuable, and species interactions in which, even as one kills another, one seemingly never acts against Life itself. It is a small leap, then, to see the Culture as the Evil against Nature, the Good.

Which Side Are You On?

Being a radical thus comes to mean taking a position on the Manichaeian battlefield, fighting for and alongside Nature. Theoretically, it may mean embodying Nature or restoring an essential

³ ed. – A renegade of Russian nobility born in the late 19th Century, this anarchist was also a prominent naturalist scientist of the day, author of the famous book 'Mutual Aid'. "Under the spell of [Charles] Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, Kropotkin has sought in vain across all Siberia for keen competition between creatures of the same species. In place of it, he has witnessed a thousand different manifestations of mutual support; perhaps the latter is a more decisive factor in survival than competition per se. The only exceptions he can think of are among his own people: bureaucracies that resist improvement, regimes that stifle their subjects, prisons that deform rather than reform"

substance of wildness within oneself, as the battlefield may be not only material but also spiritual. Actionably, it may realize itself as protecting Nature via stopping particular non-human organisms from being killed, stopping industrial development in particular places perceived as wild or sacred, or attacking persons or infrastructure associated with Civilization; as well as aligning oneself personally with Nature via learning primitive *[sic]* skills, eating a particular diet, or adopting certain spiritual beliefs.

Again, these sentiments are eminently understandable and the actions may or may not be well placed, as what is beautiful in the organic, our habitat as human organisms, is being despoiled horribly by Civilization. The globalized, industrialized, spectacle-commodity culture is destroying kinds of beings at a rate one thousand times faster than they would normally go extinct, and huge portions of wildlife have been destroyed just in recent decades as the process accelerates, reaching such a rate as to prompt the creation of a neologism, “defaunation”. Meanwhile, the always-present thinness of such efforts as conservation, sustainable agriculture, and green technology becomes an increasingly revolting joke, recently exemplified by the ridiculous efforts this past year of endangered species translocation⁴ and the attempted displacement of indigenous populations in Alvaro Obregon for the construction of a wind power farm⁵ [*ed. – including the 3rd largest in Latin America, after a 'wind-rush' for industry; see Return Fire vol.3 pg39*].

Considering all of this horror, it is not especially poetically adventurous to describe the culture as a death engine, essentially inimical to the organic. And emotionally intense or poetic writing can be a useful tool and a breath of relief amidst a general bleachedness, so long as it avoids obfuscation by being clear about how, when, and why it is doing so. As a perhaps unfortunate linguistic consequence, calling oneself anti-civilization might leave one feeling obligated to be for something else that is similarly grand in scope, something bigger than our immediate lives and relations. But while Civilization is a kind of useful shorthand that can be quite clearly defined⁶, the abundant references to Nature, animality, and wildness coloring anti-civilization/anti-industrial literature, speech, and thinking are misleading vagaries at best and phantoms at worst.

Civilization, itself a set of overlapping and mutually reinforcing reifications and their corresponding material infrastructure, is characterized and reproduced by exactly this kind of absolutist, dualistic, universalizing thought. Abstract and transcendental values are themselves in-

(Anarchists Traveling Through History, Part II: Kropotkin Escapes). This work he combined with his organising with secret councils of revolutionaries (who later assassinated the Tsar of Russia), for which he was imprisoned, before being broken out during a hospital stay and escaping to England, where he continued his naturalism publishing.

⁴ “Episode 61: Hail Satan; It’s a Beautiful World” and “Episode 66: Make Total Destroy, and Bring Us the Champagne”, Free Radical Radio, 11/07/2014 and 12/10/2014

⁵ “Alexander Dunlap on Alvaro Obregon”, Free Radical Radio, 06/07/2015

⁶ Many discussions of civilization are hampered by a lack of a clear definition of the subject. Briefly, by civilization, I mean a way of human life characterized by the growth of cities, areas of urban population sufficiently dense as to require the routine importation of food from corresponding rural surroundings characterized by agriculture. Civilized life generally includes all of the following, to varying degrees: collective activity tightly organized around a linear and numerical conception of time; a high level of ritual and symbolic culture; complex and explicit social hierarchy; political representation; the formation of a State, which attempts to monopolize the use of physical violence and delegitimize non-State violence; bureaucracy; compulsory labor (work); and societal mores and ideology rationalizing racial or cultural supremacy, dominance of Nature, and social progress [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg11*]. Civilized persons are characterized by highly reified thought, as Civilization itself is largely a set of reifications intersubjectively constructed by persons acting in social roles that create and maintain corresponding infrastructure. To be anti-civilization, then, is to be anti-reification; it thus is at least *prima facie* suspect to be in some way for a different set of reifications.

trinsically authoritarian and antithetical to embodied and vivacious life, even if they are posited for ostensibly liberatory purposes, as I have written of elsewhere⁷. To reiterate briefly, to compartmentalize one's raw, lived-and-felt, moment-to-moment experience in order to render it, to self-alienate it, into such categories as Nature or wildness is itself an act of separation. **Insofar as our loving gaze assigns to our lover fantasies of perfection, mutilating them into a quasi-divine being into which we can dissolve our inadequacies and disappointments, thus completing ourselves, we have betrayed anything worth the name of love and entered into the realm of religion.** Anarcho-Primitivism (AP, whether the nouns or the adjective) is thus, ironically, the stuff of civilized thinking, a pattern of thought that mourns for an imagined reunion with a de-anthropomorphized, but nonetheless extant, divinity.

To elaborate this point, I will unpack “*Animal Dreams*”, a recent essay by John Zerzan that appeared in the first issue of the biannual green anarchist journal *Black Seed*, as I find the AP analysis to be one of the most interesting ones with which I disagree because of something like convergent evolution: I arrive at superficially similar conclusions to the APs, but with a fundamentally different analysis.

Green Manichaeism: Anarcho-Primitivism as Cosmic Battlefield

Before examining “*Animal Dreams*” in particular, some context is in order. I am not merely accusing: for Anarcho-Primitivists, the world is *avowedly* a Manichaean battlefield. Zerzan has emphasized more than once on his radio show *Anarchy Radio*, as well as in personal exchanges, that he is dismissive of any anarchist analysis that does not regard a Civilization/Nature dualism as metaphysically fundamental: Civilization with its slavery, death, or undeath versus Nature with its freedom, wildness, and life.

In “*Animal Dreams*”, Zerzan adds to the Good seemingly all non-human animals, who apparently not only occupy the proper side of Mani's ranks but also serve as models for us to do the same. I will examine how Zerzan assigns to various animals (predominantly charismatic megafauna) humanistic and Christian virtues and how these characterizations are either misleading (because they reflect only one or a few examples among a great many) or simply wrong. Later, I will propose what I find to be a more appropriate relationship to the nonhuman.

Couple Like a Goose; Love Like a Wolf

In sharp contradistinction to much of Zerzan's writing that is, even where I disagree, compelling and provocative, “*Animal Dreams*” reads largely like a set of platitudes, some disturbingly normative for the culture. I want nonetheless to briefly begin where it has merit.

From both the piece itself as well as personal conversations with its author, it is clear that part of Zerzan's goal was to repudiate the dreadfully common and grotesquely speciesist [*ed. – see **Return Fire vol.2 pg10***] diminution of the inner lives/*umwelts* [*ed. – environmental factors collectively capable of affecting the behaviour of an individual*] / phenomenalities of nonhuman organisms. This goal is certainly worthwhile and admirable, especially in light of Behaviorist/Cartesian [*ed. – see*

⁷ “Corrosive Consciousness, Part I: How One Might Profane Green Platonism”, *Black Seed*, vol. 4, Spring 2015.

'*A Profound Dis-ease*'] residues that linger in both popular and academic cultures⁸. Zerzan aptly decries the allergy to so-called anthropomorphism, more accurately described in this particular case as qualitative inference to the presence of consciousness in nonhumans, an act of the very same kind of abduction that nearly every human commits with nearly every other human on an everyday basis⁹.

The common critique that humans can report their mental states while nonhumans cannot is laughable and evinces what a lack of understanding there is about communication: the whine of a distressed dog, the enticing change of color of a ripe fruit, the limb-waving and stridulation of a threatening tarantula, and the garish and warning colors of a toxic nudibranch [*ed. – a type of poisonous sea-going slug*] are all communication. Almost any pet owner, forager, or anyone else who has spent a good deal of time with nonhuman animals, including this author, would readily say that nonhuman animals reasonably seem to have an inner life that they are capable of communicating to a greater or lesser extent depending on the particular case. I agree completely with Zerzan that “*It is not ‘anthropomorphic’ to recognize that animals play*”¹⁰; and that we also can only loosely speculate what these inner lives are like, as “*we do not know how to even comprehend consciousnesses different from our own.*”

Where Zerzan errs, heavily and repeatedly, is his flagrant and nonsensical moralizing that dominates the piece. **He seems to wish to tell us, implicitly, the following: that we should value animals because they exemplify our popularly held morals, as he lists a number of cases of animals seemingly championing them; but also that we should view animals as moral exemplars, models of behavior, as “we are lost, but animals point to the right road.”** Besides the odd circularity inherent in this bifurcated claim that undermines its entire thrust (animals are good because they follow moral X; moral X is good because animals follow it), it is easy to find a number of counterexamples for every moral example Zerzan deploys.

Though he acknowledges, seemingly anticipating a critique like mine, that “*All is not sweetness and light in the non-human realm,*” he softens this admittance by adding “*especially in this shaken and disturbed world*”, as though the human, somehow *causa sui*, were perhaps *really* to blame. He proceeds to make this caveat close to meaningless by using the bulk of his essay to enumerate cases of non-human organisms exhibiting behaviors in line with liberal humanism or Christian ethics.

Hierarchy & Domination in Non-Humans

As an anarchist, Zerzan of course desires a world without formal hierarchy; he seeks to find animals, needlessly, to validate this desire – as though it were not sufficient for him to simply desire it, but that it instead needed to be written in the cosmos to be legitimate – and thus offers a repudiation of the commonly held idea of animal pecking order. It may indeed be the case that

⁸ The mere need for an international assembly of scientists in 2012 to sign a document declaring that at least some nonhuman animals are in fact conscious (“The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness”) is a testament to this incredible alienation.

⁹ The ancient Problem of Other Minds – the fact that we ultimately have no way of knowing, of directly experiencing, the consciousness of other beings – is ultimately indissoluble. A difference of species does not change the problem fundamentally. Because we routinely assume other humans are subjects of a life, it is just as reasonable to do the same with at least some nonhumans.

¹⁰ All unreferenced quotes following this one are from Zerzan’s “Animal Dreams” piece.

domestication induces hierarchy in some animals in whom it does not exist in the wild, such as has been recently observed with the behavior of wolves versus dogs. There are nonetheless numerous cases of dominating behavior in wild organisms.

Many parasitoids¹¹ seize control of their hosts' bodies, ending their reproductive possibilities through death or debilitation: barnacles of the genus *Sacculina* castrate their crab hosts in order to hijack their bodies, including their sex organs, for reproduction; the Gordian Worm larva inhabits an arthropod host and, maturing, forces the host to drown itself so that the adult worm may erupt from its dead body to reach an aquatic habitat; and wasps of the genus *Ichneumonidae* inject their eggs and symbiotic viruses into other insect larvae, restricting their metamorphosis and creating abnormally large larvae that, like bloated cattle, are gradually devoured alive by the maturing *Ichneumon* larvae¹². Similar behavior exists in diverse organisms, the behavior having developed numerous times among creatures not closely related to one another: mollusks, nematodes, flatworms, and so on, including non-animals like fungi and viruses.

Besides the parasitic dimension, the social Hymenoptera (colonial bees, wasps, and ants) exhibit caste societies with a rigid division of labor and violent enforcement of hierarchy via physical mutilation, ritualized dominance/submission social interactions, infanticide, and other forms of what entymologists actually dub "policing". Again, similar eusocial, hierarchical behavior is exhibited by non-Hymenopteran insects like termites as well as non-insects like certain crustaceans – creatures that are not directly related evolutionarily – suggesting that, like parasitoidism, domination is a tendency that life produces again and again, an eddy that the organic regularly recapitulates. There is thus nothing to be gained from looking at animals in some generalized way in order to legitimate our desires for anarchy.

Patriarchy, Sexuality, & Gender Relations in Non-Humans

Patriarchy is a repugnant aspect of the dominant culture that seems to lie at the core of Civilization, perhaps being among the first forms of alienation and generative of the compulsory division of labor¹³ [*ed. – also see **Return Fire vol.2 pg6***]. Any thoroughgoing anarchist analysis demands a critique of it, but Zerzan seems to think, again, that we need to look to nonhumans to rationalize this critique – this venture is a useless one, as gendered behavior among animals reveals itself to be a riotous smorgasbord of possibilities.

¹¹ Parasitoids are organisms who, like parasites, spend a significant portion of their life upon or within a host organism that they use for some combination of food, shelter, and transportation. Unlike parasites, parasitoids necessarily kill, devour, or sterilize their hosts to complete their lifecycle. They are my favorite counterexample to the moralization of nonhumans, due to the fact that their behavior is often quite horrific from a Christian/humanist perspective – so much so, in fact, that no less a figure than Charles Darwin was moved to write of them to one of his colleagues: "I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the *Ichneumonidae* with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars[...]" Here we see Darwin resisting a metaphysical flight from the real that David Bell describes in the epigraph.

¹² Interestingly, Zerzan brings up the *ichneumon*, referring to it imprecisely as a fly [*ichneumon* are Hymenopterans, closely related to other wasps, bees, sawflies, and ants; they are not Dipterans, the true flies], in order to showcase its marvelous senses; he avoids bringing up its reproductive cycle that might turn moralistic stomachs.

¹³ The earliest known monument, Göbekli Tepe, depicts numerous erect penises prominently, seemingly as signs of masculine power. Zerzan himself has suggested that patriarchy may have generated the first division of labor in his "Patriarchy, Civilization, and the Origins of Gender".

Among our closest relatives, despite Zerzan's highlighting of lioness hunting and elk matriarchy, the overwhelming majority of mammals are polygynous, often with harem-holding male dominance and sexual dimorphism that leaves the male considerably larger, stronger, and more aggressive. Perhaps the starkest example is that of the elephant seal, in which males violently compete for harems of females numbering up to the hundreds.

In a variety of invertebrates, again having evolved repeatedly in diverse phyla, mating takes place through *traumatic insemination*, in which a spined – literally weaponized – penis pierces the female's body to deliver sperm directly to her viscera. One theory for why this vicious method evolved is to bypass *mating plugs*, an adhesive substance secreted by penises to literally glue a female's reproductive tract closed after mating in order to block the sperm of competing males. I thus shudder at the brazenly general sentiment that "*animals[...] are the right road.*"

Moreover, even engaging in comparative gender relations among the incomprehensible diversity of nonhumans is a close to useless endeavor given the incommensurability of gender across species. In a great many animals, particularly many arthropods but also certain vertebrates like hyenas, females are physically larger and stronger, more socially and sexually dominant, and longer-lived, inverting the physical and social power relations characteristic of patriarchal humanity. And a good deal of genderfucking is present with the abundance of hermaphroditism and sex-changing among nonhuman animals – a huge diversity of animals are capable of changing their sexual organs to make the best of their conditions. One is moved to wonder what could possibly be gained by making human value inferences from beings so different from ourselves, most of whom are indifferent to these human values.

Coupled with Zerzan's appeals to anti-patriarchy is a shockingly Christian sentimentalism for monogamy, as he cites geese and gibbons favorably for their long-term coupling. Why Zerzan is implicitly praising a human institution so closely associated with patriarchy, intimate abuse [*ed. – see Return Fire vol. 1 pg 46*], and commodity culture is bemusing *prima facie*; but his information is also simply wrong, as this proposition has been debunked along with so many others about nonhuman monogamy: studies since the late 70s have found that, for the goose, "*promiscuity is a part of the repertoire of yet another seemingly monogamous bird.*" An estimated 95-97% of mammals are similarly nonmonogamous. **In contrast, ruffs, wetland birds in the sandpiper family, mate in a manner resemblant of a queer bacchanal that, I must say, were I ever to eschew my aversion to being prescriptive and morally reifying nonhumans, would be what I wish more of us would consider to be "the right road": among these highly promiscuous birds, there are three different male phenotypes, including a female-resembling male that the very masculine, domineering male phenotype will mate with, both topping and bottoming, seemingly because the homoeroticism attracts the attention of observing females and entices them to join the orgy.**

Zerzan similarly cites examples of animal familiarity, devotion, and parental care – and, certainly, these exist, but only as some among a great many. With parenting and devotion, there is the octopus mother who starves herself, often fatally, vigilantly defending her young; all around her are the numerous and variegated marine organisms – cnidarians, mollusks, fish, crustaceans, etc. – engaging in the zero-parenting that is broadcast fertilization, in which eggs and sperm are both expelled into the water, the resultant zygotes carried away for a planktonic larval existence in which many are sure to perish. As far as familiarity, we see on the one hand the whipspider mother who watches over her eggs and then carries her young on her back while, strikingly among arthropods, she seems to affectionately caress them. On the other hand, we see the canni-

balism among young sharks and strepsiptera (parasitic insects who superficially resemble flies), who devour their siblings before even leaving the egg or their mother's body, respectively; the incest among certain insects; and the parasitic parenting of cuckoos and certain insects, whose parents leave their offspring to be cared for by other species, as these host species mistake them for their own young through cloaking mechanisms.

There is thus among the animals no model for egalitarian gender relations and the ideal family. There is only an incredible variety of genders, gendered behavior, and familial relations that highlight how arbitrary human norms are at any particular time or place. If the world offers us no model, *why can we not choose our own* without recourse to it?

Mercy & Indifference

Continuing with Christian sentimentalism, Zerzan attempts to declaw the wolf, and perhaps predators in general, by saying it may be the case that “*wolves only kill animals that are near their end anyway – the old, sick, injured*”. Though hedged as a supposition, it is difficult not to see Zerzan attempting to soften predation into a world of mercy and remorse. And, again, he cherry-picks his evidence to find the conclusions he wants, ignoring readily available counter-examples. A 2009 observation of *Canis Lupus*¹⁴ in a region in which they had a variety of potential prey found, based on sampling the wolves' scat, that 96.4% of the scat held remains of either roe deer or wild boar, thus indicating the wolves' primary prey. Of the prey, 74.1% of the roe deer and 84.2% of the wild boar were juveniles, less than a year old. Over time, the wolves took turns targeting the roe deer and the wild boar, each during its birthing period, for the reasons one might expect: “*The positive selection of young roe deer and wild boar may be considered opportunist behaviour, because the individuals of this age class are easier to capture than adults due to their inexperience.*” Indeed, “*Roe deer fawns are left alone by their mothers for long periods of time, making them even more vulnerable to wolf predation[...]*” Mercy, it ain't – babynapping, rather. The authors had occasion to cite six previous studies, ranging from 1970 to 2004, that supported the conclusion that wolves target vulnerable juveniles preferentially. One might reasonably infer, as others have, that they might target the elderly and ill for the same reasons – simple ease and opportunism. Far from experiencing mercy or remorse, the manner in which wolf pups play at hunting to gradually increase their skills suggests to me that the wolf feels hunger, desire, joy, and exhilaration as it hunts and kills.

Of course, Zerzan is likely motivated by a desire to redeem the wolf from its popular demonization as infinitely murderous, killing without even the need to eat. To make such a case, I much prefer Farley Mowat, who, besides indicting human civilization as being the real mindless killer, writes at the conclusion of his loosely autobiographical novel *Never Cry Wolf*, “*Somewhere to the eastward a wolf howled[...]* for me, it was a voice which spoke of the lost world that was once ours, before we

chose the alien role, a world which I had glimpsed and almost entered[...]” **Mowat here redeems the besmirched wolf not by apologizing for its killing, but rather by pointing at what seems a beautiful intimacy between the wolf and its world.** Similarly, in a theme exhibited throughout his work, Nietzsche [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.2 pg52*] saw in animality (including

¹⁴ Barja, Isabel. “Prey and prey-age preference by the Iberian wolf *Canis lupus signatus* in a multiple-prey ecosystem” *Wildlife Biology*, vol. 15

uncivilized humans) a kind of profound, child-like innocence; not a moral innocence of being gentle, humble, and meek, all of which he clearly despised, but an innocence of unmediated life in which one is in tune with their senses, makes no apologies for their instincts, and is unafraid to grasp immediate joy.

Gaianism¹⁵ & Misanthropy as Closeted Humanism & Anthropocentrism

At times, Zerzan exhibits nothing so much as his apparent biological ignorance. He writes, oddly misanthropically for someone who repudiates misanthropy, *"We are the top of the food chain, which makes us the only animal nobody needs."* Besides the term *food chain* (Zerzan will later, inexplicably, use this same term in sneer quotes, as though he finds it unbelievable) being a bit of a misnomer – it is only one aspect of a food web, used to organize organisms into trophic levels, that is sometimes misleadingly employed to rank organisms in an Aristotelian Great Chain of Being-esque manner¹⁶ – one is moved by Zerzan's statement to ask whether he has ever heard of dust and face mites, roundworms, flukes, or tapeworms, to name only a few and those very broadly, or, if we extend beyond animals, any number of decomposers, human gut flora, mitochondria, and so on *ad nauseam*. Zerzan is most definitely aware of the evidence that North American Indians interacted with their forest ecosystems so as to create pockets of sub-climax forest succession zones that increased biodiversity in the forest as a whole¹⁷, so why is he playing these self-shaming rhetorical games?

What is such a misanthropy except another form of human exceptionalism, another way of making the human the one and only Other who stands apart from everything else? As the Invisible Committee notes, referencing the anthropocentrism motivating the widespread move toward naming our era the Anthropocene, *"For the last time, [Man] assigns himself [sic] the main role, even if it's to accuse himself of having trashed everything – the seas and the skies, the ground and what's underground – even if it's to confess his guilt for the unprecedented extinction of plant and animal species."*

Underlying all of the problems outlined so far, moreover, is the deeper question of anthropomorphism that Zerzan uses to frame the entire piece. **Zerzan quotes Henry Beston's apt statement, "For the animal shall not be measured by man", but he seems not to take it to heart.** Yes, of course it is a mistake to have such an intense allergy to anthropomorphism that one is averse to the abduction that nonhuman animals are conscious – such an attitude suggests massive alienation. But Zerzan has tumbled over the edge into an anthropocentrism that projects his own morality onto the nonhuman world. As I write elsewhere of his friend and frequent col-

¹⁵ ed. – see **Invasive**.

¹⁶ ed. – Aristotle's hierarchical view of the universe was re-earthed by Christian theologians during the Middle Ages, and remained influential through to the birth of the modern era. God sits at the top of this pyramid, followed by angels, then men, then women, then 'primitives', then animals, then plants, then rocks, then sand, then soil etc. In the inherently body-hating tradition that Christian faith conveys, those at the top are perfect, while those at the bottom are imperfect (soil being all 'body' and no 'soul', whereas God is all soul and no body). We could say that in secular modernity, now abstract scientific law has replaced God at the top of this still-accepted pyramid, and that machines (who live forever and don't make 'human error') have replaced angels between God and 'men'...

¹⁷ Jacke, Dave and Toensmeier, Eric. *Edible Forest Gardens* [ed. – also, see **Invasive**].

laborator Kevin Tucker, Zerzan has committed the same error as the ancient Stoics: he rejects anthropocentrism, but, in doing so, he is in fact anthropocentric in a roundabout way.

Zerzan indicts others for projecting pecking order, Freudianism [*ed. – for example, in Animal Dreams, that “the fallacy that the Freudian paradigm of murderous rivalry between fathers and sons represents the state of nature”*], and hierarchy onto the nonhuman world, but he does the very same with his own values; once he has painted the nonhuman biosphere a color of his liking, obscuring and pretending not to notice its incredible variation, he swears his allegiance to it. He asks, posing as the *ingénue* after his obfuscation, “*Might it not be that nature is for the happiness of all species, not just one?*” **I reply by asking what is this “nature” that is somehow different than the gestalt “of all species” and the world’s abiotic elements they inhabit and cocreate; and what would it mean for this totality to be “for” anything, as though the gestalt of innumerable valuing beings could somehow emergently value something in and of itself or, even if it did, that we could somehow comprehend this evaluation?** Like Tucker, Zerzan has regularly distanced himself from the Left and has written apt criticisms of it¹⁸, yet he is still operating on the same Manichaeic logic that has characterized most forms of anarchism and leftism since their earliest days. Bakunin¹⁹ saw human beings, originating in the objective good of Nature, as essentially moral until they were corrupted by the unnaturalness of the State; Zerzan extends this line of thinking by exalting the as-yet-uncorrupted nonhuman animals as moral exemplars.

To Love the Inhuman

Since I was a very young child, for as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by nonhuman organisms. The stranger, the more inhuman a creature was, the more I loved it – it fascinated me to know, for example, that a creature like a schistosome (a blood fluke that parasitizes first snails, then mammals during its lifecycle, eventually inhabiting a blood capillary) has a life incomprehensibly different from my own: sensing mostly through smell, metamorphosing multiple times, living as though “a vein is a river”²⁰, and mating perpetually as an adult. **I am surrounded by aliens who are yet my kin, each enclosed in its own *umwelt*, such that the world is a nigh-infinite array of mutually mysterious yet mutually informing perceptual universes that are constantly spilling into one another.** To call that vast and mysterious gestalt either good or bad, something to be either followed or rejected, is the greatest philosophical impropriety, as it entails tremendously overstepping what can be known or evaluated.

The only reaction that seems appropriate is something like Nietzsche’s Dionysian Pessimism, “*a general approbation of the real in all its chaotic and cruel presence*”²¹, because it is strange and lovely, awesome and ecstatic to be alive – one is moved to joy *despite* the purposelessness and

¹⁸ Consider his “The Left? No Thanks!” as well as his excellent examinations of the historical role of unions in Elements of Refusal.

¹⁹ *ed.* – Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin, another influential 19th Century anarchist from Russia and bitter foe of its imperialism in east and central Europe (amongst that by other powers). Deported from France, apprehended in Dresden for participation in a Czech rebellion of 1848, and imprisoned in Russia before escaping to Japan, the U.S. and then Europe, where he joined insurrections such as that in Lyon, France, 1870.

²⁰ The quote is taken from Zimmer, Carl. Parasite Rex.

²¹ Bell, David F. Introduction to Joyful Cruelty by Clément Rosset.

lack of objective value one readily perceives. I relish that my body eats and shits, fucks and rots, pointlessly – that it dissolves other creatures into it, annihilating their consciousnesses even as a myriad of new bodies and minds erupt from my effluence and will erupt from my dead flesh. I recall once when I, having just fucked in the Hambacher Forest [*ed. – see **Rebels Behind Bars; Some Light on the Investigation Leading to the Imprisonment of the Comrade Arrested on April 13th***], watched as several flies descended to start feeding on my ejaculate within maybe ten seconds – *that* is Dionysian Pessimism. In short, to love the inhuman, do not preach to it or of it – simply accept it as such, and revel in that acceptance.

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Bellamy Fitzpatrick
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a critique of John Zerzan's "Animal Dreams"
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